

IN THE CLAIMS

1-8. (Cancelled)

9. (Currently amended) A support member for a high pressure filtration semipermeable membrane,

said support member formed of a nonwoven fabric,

said nonwoven fabric formed of polyester fibers which are heat bound to each other into at least one monolayered paper web, said polyester fibers containing 50% 30-70% by weight or more of a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more, a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a mean single fiber fineness of 1.0-6.5 denier, and

said nonwoven fabric having a mean value of breaking length at an elongation of 5% in a lengthwise direction (MD) and a crosswise direction (CD) of 4.0 km or more, having an air permeability of 0.2-5.0 cc/cm²•s, and having a pore size (maximum pore diameter) of 42 μ m or less,

wherein said nonwoven fabric is made by a process comprising the steps of:

(i) forming a first monolayered paper web comprising said polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more, a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a mean single fiber fineness of 1.0-6.5 denier together with a heat weldable binder fiber in a weight ratio of 70:30-30:70,

(ii) subjecting the first monolayered paper web to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the fibers to each other,

(iii) optionally applying a second monolayered paper web to said first monolayered paper web, and

(iv) repeating step (ii).

~~the support member being used in contact with the semipermeable membrane.~~

10. (Previously presented) The support member according to claim 9, wherein said nonwoven fabric contains said polyester fiber in an amount of 50-70% by weight.

11. (Previously presented) The support member according to claim 9, wherein said polyester fiber is poly(alkylene arylate) comprised of a diol unit selected from an ethylene glycol unit and a 1,4-butanediol unit and a dicarboxylic acid unit selected from a terephthalic acid unit and a naphthalenedicarboxylic acid unit.

12. (Withdrawn) A process for preparing a support member for a semipermeable membrane, which comprises:

(i) forming a monolayered paper web comprising a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more and a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a heat weldable binder fiber in a weight ratio of 70:30-30:70, and

(ii) subjecting the monolayered paper web to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the fibers to each other.

13. (Withdrawn) The process according to claim 12, which further comprises

(iii) laminating a second monolayered paper web or other fibrous web on the heat-treated monolayered paper web, and then

(iv) subjecting the laminated webs to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the webs together.

14. (Withdrawn) The process according to claim 12, wherein the heat weldable binder fiber is a polyester fiber.

15. (Withdrawn) A process for preparing a support member for a semipermeable membrane, which comprises:

(i) forming a monolayered paper web comprising a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more and a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a heat weldable binder fiber, in a weight ratio of 70:30-30:70, and

(ii) laminating a second monolayered paper web or other fibrous web on the monolayered paper web, and then

(iii) subjecting the laminated webs to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the webs together.

16. (Withdrawn) The process according to claim 15, wherein the heat weldable binder fiber is a polyester fiber.

17. (Previously presented) A semipermeable membrane comprising a semipermeable film formed on a side of the support member according to claim 9.

18. (Currently amended) A high pressure filtration nonwoven fabric, formed of polyester fibers which are heat bound to each other into at least one monolayered paper web, said polyester fibers containing ~~50%~~ 30-70% by weight or more of a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more, a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a mean single fiber fineness of 1.0-6.5 denier, and

said nonwoven fabric having a mean value of breaking length at an elongation of 5% in a lengthwise direction (MD) and a crosswise direction (CD) of 4.0 km or more, having an air permeability of 0.2-5.0 cc/cm² •s, and having a pore size (maximum pore diameter) of 42 μm or less,

wherein said nonwoven fabric is made by a process comprising the steps of:

(i) forming a first monolayered paper web comprising said polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more, a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a mean single fiber fineness of 1.0-6.5 denier together with a heat weldable binder fiber in a weight ratio of 70:30-30:70,

(ii) subjecting the first monolayered paper web to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the fibers to each other,

(iii) optionally applying a second monolayered paper web to said first monolayered paper web, and

(iv) repeating step (ii).

the wherein a semipermeable film is formed on a side of said nonwoven fabric being used in contact with the semipermeable membrane.